

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome

What is Hantavirus?

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome was first discovered in the United States in May of 1993, when a number of deaths were attributed to an unknown pulmonary syndrome in the 4-corners area of the southwest. At the time, this virus was identified as the Sin Nombre strain of Hantavirus. The virus has since been identified in other states across the country including California and Santa Barbara County.

How is it transmitted?

Hantavirus is spread from wild rodents to people. Human to human transmission is not known to occur. The virus, which is found in rodent urine, saliva, and feces gets into the air as mist or dust from these excretions. Breathing this mist is the most common way of becoming infected; however you can also become infected by touching your mouth or nose after handling contaminated materials.

What kinds of rodents carry Hantavirus?

Technically, Hantavirus belongs to a group of viruses (9 so far) each with a separate rodent carrier. The deer mouse is the known carrier of Hantavirus found throughout the United States, except the Southeast and East Coast. (In these areas, the cotton mouse is the known carrier.)

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome usually appear within 2 weeks of infection. The first symptoms are generally flu like, with a fever, headache, severe muscle aches, coughing, vomiting and abdominal pain. The primary symptom of this disease is difficulty breathing. This is caused by fluid build up in the lungs which can quickly progress to an inability to breathe. There is a 50% fatality rate due to respiratory failure. At this time there is no known cure and treatment is mainly supportive in nature.

Is it safe to travel to areas where Hantavirus has been reported?

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome is a rare disease. However, simple preventative measures can help reduce your risk of infection:

- Avoid areas which are infested by rodents.
- Maintain your residence in such a way that would discourage the attraction of rodents.

- Ensure proper storage and disposal of trash, garbage, and clutter.
- Don't leave pet food and water dishes out.
- Keep the area adjacent to your house or cabin clear of brush and wood piles.
- Make sure that potential entry points into homes and cabins are secure.

What do I do if I find rodents or their droppings?

It is very important that proper procedures are followed in the clean up of any rodent infested areas. Infestation is evident by numerous rodent droppings and or evidence of nesting and/or dead rodents. Clean up procedures must be conducted in a manner that does not create dust and thoroughly disinfects the surfaces and materials being cleaned up.

NEVER USE A VACUUM OR A BROOM TO CLEAN UP

A RODENT INFESTED AREA.

Always use a mop and wet rags soaked in a 1 to 5 dilution of household bleach in water; e.g., one cup of bleach mixed with five cups of water. Use this same solution to disinfect any rodent bodies that may be encountered during clean up. All materials cleaned up in this manner should be double bagged in plastic trash bags and placed in the trash. Wear rubber gloves and consider using a dust mask and some sort of eye protection as well.

Fact: Hantavirus acquired its name in the 1950's from the site of the first recognition for causing a type of hemorrhagic fever in soldier located in the Hantaan area of Korea.